

PERCEPTION OF AGE: EFFECTS OF AMBIENT AROMA

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While the determination of age has been primarily mediated visually, the ambient odor may also have an influence. To determine this, thirty-seven subjects (age average of 28 years, ranging from 13 to 71 years) in a single blinded, randomized fashion, estimated the age of models in twenty photographs while wearing either blank masks or masks impregnated with a grape, cucumber or grapefruit aroma. The grape odor ($p = 0.198$) and the cucumber odor ($p = 0.244$) had no significant effects. The grapefruit aroma reduced subjects' perception of overall models' ages by an average of approximately three years ($p = 0.025$) and of female models' age by five years ($p = 0.053$). Possible mechanisms whereby the grapefruit aroma created a rejuvenating effect with relationship to perceived age includes induction of positive affect, sexual arousal, anxiolysis, change in cognitive set, and odor induced visual distortion. The perceived rejuvenating effect of the grapefruit aroma may have utility in facilitating intergenerational communication or act as an adjuvant like botulism toxin, in cosmetic and pharmaceutical usage to impact perception of age.